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The Master Argument in the Parmenides of Plato

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by

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Proem

In my first thirty years of life
I roamed hundreds and thousands of miles.
Walked by rivers through deep green grass
Entered cities of boiling red dust.
Tried drugs, but couldn't make Immortal;
Read books and wrote poems on history.

Who'd ever guess that I'd leave the dusty world
climbing the southern slope of Cold Mountain?

HAN SHAN

THE MASTER ARGUMENT IN THE PARMENIDES

The passage 133a-135c in Plato's Parmenides¹ includes an argument about the knowability of forms and an illustrative example concerning masters and Mastership. It is because of the example that I call the argument the Master Argument.

It is a small manageable part of a rather awesome whole which I consider to be one of Plato's most profound dialogues. It would be impossible to treat the whole in one article or even in a whole series of articles. I need not fear writing about something which is already overdone, while there is a veritable plethora of commentaries on the "third man argument", there has as yet been very little close analysis of the master argument. In my interpretation I follow Plotinus, Proclus, Thomas Taylor² and Pierre Grimes.³ I do not think that the dialogue is

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1. Plato, Parmenides, F.M. Cornford translator, in Hamilton and Cairns Ed. The Collected Dialogues of Plato Bollingen series LXXI, NY, 1966.
 2. Thomas Taylor, the Cambridge Platonist, published a translation of the Parmenides in 1804 which is still one of the most faithful translations ever made. His habit of analogical thinking made him sensitive to Plato's use of analogy.
 3. Pierre Grimes is an instructor at Golden West College in Huntington Beach, California who has been very influential in the formation of my views on Plato and philosophy.

a joke but rather think it has a serious ontological import.

The Parmenides is regarded as one of the middle dialogues, usually placed after the Republic and before the Timaeus.¹ There has been a controversy concerning the date of the Timaeus, which seems to be an anomaly in the Platonic corpus, given the naive view of Plato's writings. According to the naive view, Plato had a "theory of forms" in the early middle works (Phaedo and Republic) which he criticized (some say refuted) in the Parmenides and subsequently abandoned (or at least radically altered) for a new theory found in the trilogy Theatetus, Sophist, Statesman. The Timaeus is supposed to have the old theory intact but yet come after the abandonment of that theory so it is an anomaly and commentators try to prove with stylometric arguments that it came earlier. I wish to question some of the assumptions of the naive view and to reconcile the passage (133a-135c) with the spirit of the earlier works.

To the naive view I oppose the following; Plato had no "theory of forms", therefore he was not criticising "his own theory" in the first half of the Parmenides and finally the passage can be reconciled with the spirit of the earlier works.

1. Cherniss H.F., "Relation of the Timaeus to Plato's later dialogues." in Allen, R. E., Ed. Studies in Plato's Metaphysics, N. Y. Humanities Press, 1965.

A "theory of forms" supposedly explains how it is that things are as they are. The locus classicus of the "theory of forms" is Phaedo 100c: "whatever else is beautiful apart from absolute beauty is beautiful because it partakes of that absolute beauty, and for no other reason...the one thing that makes that object beautiful is the presence in it or association with it in what ever way the relation comes about, of absolute beauty. I do not go so far as to insist upon the precise details."¹

If this account of what makes beautiful objects beautiful is to be a theory there must be an account of participation which Socrates does not give. We do not have an explanation, a causal account of how beautiful things are beautiful. What we do have is a move to turn one's attention from perceptible color and symmetry toward the intelligible world. Having made his statement about Beauty Socrates can then ask what Beauty itself is. Since he nowhere in the earlier dialogues articulated an account of participation, I claim that Plato did not have a "theory of forms" and that what is criticised in the first half of the Parmenides is not 'his own theory' but hypotheses about participation. It is crucial to remember that only someone interested

1. Plato, Phaedo, Hugh Tredernnick, Translator, in Hamilton and Cairns op cit. p. 81ff.

(as Aristotle was and Plato was not) in explaining the phenomenal world and how things are as they are would require a "theory of forms". Forms play a radically different role for Plato and for the Neo-Platonists who caught the spirit of the dialogues despite Aristotle and the Stoics. For Plato the forms play a role in the ascent to wisdom. I think of many ropes running up ~~to~~ a mountain to the summit which may be used in the ascent as well as in the descent. The forms may not be the ultimate objects of knowledge but they are spoken of as knowable, for instance in the Symposium Socrates talks of the vision of Beauty itself.¹

The master argument is one which a sceptic might offer to show that forms if they do exist are not knowable by humans. It does indeed show that our everyday shopkeepers knowledge will not know the forms but it does not demonstrate their absolute unknowability.

The master argument is the last of a series of difficulties concerning the forms which Parmenides raised in the first half of the dialogue. It comes near the middle of the work and may help to relate the two halves which commentators treat separately.

The difficulties all involve the notion of participation. Commentators ignore the line at 133a "other

1. Plato, Symposium 210d ff. in Hamilton and Cairns op cit.

things do not partake of forms by being like them; we must look for other means by which they partake." This suggests that the last argument which follows immediately after that line is concerned with looking for other means and as it concerns Knowledge, it suggests that Knowledge is that other means. I must distinguish between knowledge and Knowledge itself, where the former is our everyday shopkeepers knowledge and the latter is altogether different. I shall write about this all later. The notion of participation was not previously articulated and in the Parmenides we have the first analysis of that term. Socrates used it in a straightforward way of talking to clarify a distinction¹ which Zeno had misused in the treatise which he had brought to Athens to read.

The treatise contained the following sophistic argument, "If things are many they must be both like and unlike which is impossible; unlike things cannot be like, nor like things unlike".² Zeno had confounded a type distinction between forms and things, which was obviously common among the Greeks. They distinguished between things and forms, between green grass and green itself,

1. Parmenides 129a. It is interesting to notice that Socrates uses nine examples and to try to map those examples onto the nine hypotheses in the second half of the dialogue.

2. Ibid. 127.

between like things and likeness itself. It was assumed that likeness could not be unlike, but even so that does not prevent Socrates from being like Phaedrus and unlike Aristotle. He could be said to participate in both likeness and unlikeness. He could also be said to be both like and unlike. Parmenides subjects the notion of participation to scrutiny.

The first aporia of the series of five difficulties which Parmenides raised in the first half of the dialogue is based upon the assumption that forms are wholes. Parmenides asks whether things participate in the whole form or in a part. This is a very materialistic way of thinking of forms, indeed the analogies used are of putting a sail over many men, and cutting up a pie. Either disjunct proves to be untenable. This calls for an analysis of the kind of unity which forms have. That I think is one of the functions of the hypotheses about unity in the second half of the dialogue. I believe that the first half of the book is to the second half as book Beta of Aristotle's Metaphysics is to book Gamma, but it may be more subtle than that, that is to say there may be no "answers" given in the second half but through the insights gained through dialectical reflection on the book, one may gain understanding of these matters.

The second aporia which has been called "the third man argument" has an extensive literature from Aristotle to Vlastos among the commentators. It demonstrates an infinite regress for the "theory of forms". It is based upon the assumption that Largeness and large things would both appear large, and thus fall under a new form Largeness₁. However, it is questionable whether forms can be said to appear. They are intelligible and not sensible, while large things are perceptible and unintelligible. In the Phaedo Socrates had said that Beauty itself alone was beautiful and that anything else that was beautiful was because of its participation in Beauty itself. Even if he says that Beauty itself is beautiful, does this mean we can compare the appearances of Beauty itself and beautiful things? By analogy does it mean that Largeness is itself large?

I feel like a Berber tribesman speculating about floating in the sea? "It takes a man of great natural gifts to see that a form does exist...and another more gifted to discover it." (135b) I feel that the greatest problem in reading Plato is that one hardly has a glimpse of what Plato is talking about, except occasionally and that only enough to urge him on.

The third aporia criticises the suggestion put forth by the young Socrates that forms might be thoughts. Parmenides reminds him that thoughts are thoughts of

something, that is of forms. Forms are spoken of as the objects of discourse or thought, they are the objects of dialectical reflection.

It is assumed that forms exist. We can compare the passage at 211b in the Symposium where Diotima speaks of Beauty as "subsisting of itself and by itself in an eternal oneness." Subjective thoughts simply don't exist in that manner.

The fourth argument criticizes the notion that forms might be patterns and that things partake in forms by being like them. If the likeness were symmetrical then there would be another infinite regress, since there must be something else in virtue of which forms and things resemble each other. Parmenides concludes, "it follows that the other things do not partake in forms by being like them; we must look for some other means by which they partake. 133a. Cornford and others ignore this remark. As the final argument concerns Knowledge itself, it suggests that perhaps Knowledge itself is that other means.

I will now quote the passage upon which I am commenting in the translation of Professor Ronald Hathaway.¹ I have felt the need to have a new and more literal translation as a ground for my analysis of the argument.

1. Dr. Ronald F. Hathaway, Professor of Philosophy, University of California, Santa Barbara.

133A P. Do you not see then, Socrates, he said, how great the perplexity is for anyone who marks off forms being just themselves by themselves?

S. Yes.

P. You should know then, he said, that you have
B barely grasped how great the perplexity is if you persist in always positing one form, distinct and apart, for each existing thing.

S. How is that?, he said.

P. There are plenty of others, but the greatest is this one. Supposing someone were to say that it would not be fitting to know forms of the kind that we were saying must exist, then no one could show the one saying this that he was mistaken unless the one who took up the argument happened to have experience of many things, was not without inborn talent, and was willing to follow a great many things from every side in treating the subject systematically while showing this, for otherwise whoever maintained that by force of necessity the
C forms were unknown would remain unconvinced.

S. In what way, Parmenides, asked Socrates.

P. Because, Socrates, I believe that you or anybody else who posited a certain being itself by itself for each thing would agree to begin

with that none of these is in our region.

S. Quite so, for how could it be itself by itself otherwise, said Socrates.

P. Very well, he replied, Then those forms which are what they are with relation to one another have their being with relation to themselves, not with relation to those likenesses (or however we are to regard them), by partaking of which each of us is named; and these with the same names as those are related to themselves but not related to the forms, and they are named with reference to themselves but not with reference to those.

S. What do you mean?, Socrates asked.

P. Well suppose, said Parmenides, that one of us is master or servant of another. He is not the servant of the master as such, what a master is, nor is he the master of the servant as such, what a servant is, but simply one man of another man, both of us being men. Master-ship itself is what it is relative to servanthood, and servanthood itself in the same way relative to mastership itself, and the things in our region do not have their power relative those, nor those relative to this region, but, as I said, those things are themselves related

to themselves, and the things in this region in the same manner are related to themselves.

134A Or do you follow all this?

S. I follow it well, said Socrates.

P. Then, he said, also knowledge itself, what knowledge is, would be knowledge of this thing itself, what truth is?

S. Of course.

P. Every sort of knowledge, what it is to be that, would be knowledge of each existing thing, what it is to be that, or not?

S. Yes.

P. But the knowledge in our region would be of the truth that lies in our region, and so each sort of knowledge in our region would be of each of the existing things in our region?

B

S. It is necessary.

P. But surely we neither have the forms themselves, as you agreed, nor is it possible in our region?

S. By no means.

P. And the classes themselves of what each thing is are known by the form of knowledge itself?

S. Yes.

P. We surely do not have that?

S. No indeed.

P. Then no one of the forms is known by us,
since we have no share of knowledge itself.

S. It seems not.

C P. So what beauty itself is and the good and
all the things that we assumed as forms are
unknown to us.

S. It turns out that way.

P. But consider this even more fantastic consequence.

S. Which?

P. Would you claim that if there is indeed a
sort of knowledge by itself it is far more
precise than the knowledge in our region,
and in this regard is beautiful, and so on
with the rest?

S. Yes.

P. Then surely if anything else has a share
of this knowledge, would you say that anything but a god has the most precise knowledge?

S. That is necessary.

D P. But will a god be able then to know the
things in our region, since he has his
own knowledge?

S. Why not?

P. Because, said Parmenides, we have agreed,

Socrates, that it is the case that neither the forms have the power that they have relative to things in our region nor do things in our region have their power relative to those, but each is related to each.

S. We did agree to that.

P. Then if the most precise mastership and the most precise knowledge exists for the god, neither is that mastership exercised over us nor does that knowledge know us or anything else in our region, just as likewise we do not rule over them with the sort of rule that is in our region nor do we know anything of a god with our sort of knowledge. They by the same principle neither are masters of us, nor do they know human things, being gods.

S. But surely, he replied, the argument is fantastic if it compels someone to deny knowledge to a god!

135A

P. Yet these things, Socrates, said Parmenides, and indeed a great many more hold of necessity of the forms, if there are to be forms themselves of existing things and if someone is going to mark off a form as one thing by itself. The result is that the listener feels perplexed and doubts that these things exist,

or if they do exist, infers that it is absolutely necessary that they remain unknown to human nature, and in claiming these things he seems to have a good point, and as we said, is unusually hard to convince. It is a man
 B of very great inborn talent who grasps that there is a kind of each thing and a being itself by itself [for each kind], but it would involve an even more marvelous power of discovery and for teaching another actually to elucidate well all these matters.

S. I follow you, Parmenides, said Socrates; what you say is much to my way of thinking.

I shall discuss the argument in detail. It begins with the assumption that each form is itself by itself. I take the phrase 'itself by itself' to signify that the forms are separated apart from the many things which partake in them. I do not think that the phrase has the stronger function of indicating ontological independence in the manner of Spinoza's substance which exists by, that is through, itself.

Since whatever is simply one cannot even be said 'to be', and since forms are said to be, then it is implied that forms are whole and not simple. Yet they are not perceptible wholes, but intelligible wholes. Think

of the difference between the intelligible song and the perceptible song. In the Symposium Beauty itself is spoken of as "the same inviolable whole." (211b)

Both Socrates and Parmenides "see that a form exists". At 130a Socrates talks of forms as "the objects apprehended in reflection" and Parmenides at 135e talks of "these objects which are specially apprehended in discourse."

At 130b-c Parmenides and Socrates discuss four lists of terms as to whether there were forms of the things in those lists. These four lists neatly map onto the divided line. Socrates agrees that there are the normative forms and the mathematical forms but hesitates to agree that there are forms of the two lower parts of the line. In the list which he does agree to are; Likeness, Unity, Plurality, Justice, Beauty, Goodness. In the hypotheses at the second half of the dialogue the first three are discussed but the normative forms are not discussed.

It has been assumed in early works that beside the many beautiful objects there was Beauty itself, beside the many masters there was Mastership. Socrates always turned the discussion away from masters to Mastership, away from things and physical examples to forms. We can talk of green grass and green cars, or we can talk of green itself apart from particular instances. When

we get involved in an intellectual conversation we fix our attention on ideas, on forms rather than on things.

In the case of Beauty and Justice and Goodness, I do think that there is a Beauty itself which can be intuitively apprehended, and without which we are lost in a sea of relativism. The problem is that the apprehension of Beauty itself is so intimately connected with self-knowledge which is so rare that it is hard to talk about Beauty.

To sum up this first premise, it is the assumption that forms have a real existence apart from sensible things. The second premise, "No such real being exists in our world" emphasizes the separation. Here 'our world' must refer to the sensible world, the everyday world we live in. Since the forms are not perceptible they are not in our world, this is also part of the logic of the distributive function of the phrase 'itself by itself' which serves to separate forms from the things in our world. The phrase which is translated in our world can also be read 'in us' which would mean subjective, like concepts and this had been disproven in the third aporia. In general the force of this premise is to emphasize the transcendent nature of the forms. We can appreciate this best if we consider masters and Mastership, we see the many masters but we don't see Mastership. Likewise the many judges hand down opinions

based upon precedents, but there is no Justice in our world. Again no two things are equal yet we have the idea of equality.

There are two realms, here in our everyday world, and there in the intelligible realm. The next two premises of the argument concern the relation in these realms and the absence of cross correlation.

First it is stated that forms have their being in relation to each other and not in relation to things in our world. It would be absurd for forms which are, each itself by itself to depend for their being upon things in this world. Mastership is what it is in relation to other forms. 'Mastership' is the translation of the Greek despoteia which signifies the power of a master over a slave or the relation of a master to a slave. It is related to its correlate which signifies the relation of a slave to a master.

If forms do have their being in relation to each other then none of them can be essentially isolated and the intelligible world is not made up of discrete parts. It has been said that forms are to the intelligible world as facets of a diamond are to the diamond, but the intelligible world has a unity which can hardly be reached by a materialistic metaphor.

As forms have their being in relation to each other so things are related to other things and not to forms.

For instance many men are called masters, not in relation to Mastership but in relation to institutions, to the fact that a man happens to own a slave. In so doing he is like other men who own slaves and so is called 'master'. Consider whether masters are related to the forms of Mastership and Slavery. Obviously the master is not master of Slavery since then he would be a perfect slave. Is he related to Mastery? If that includes domination, does he dominate either himself or another? I claim that he does neither. He does not have occasion to dominate himself because he is always enjoying the fruits of the slaves' labor. On the other hand he does not dominate the slave, but it is the slave who must exercise stoic self-discipline in order to avoid punishment. It remains open as a possibility that a free man might dominate himself, as the philosopher who is the paradigm of temperance and self-control does. For the most part masters who own slaves neither dominate themselves nor others and so I say that they do not participate in Mastership.

To sum up the first four premises. First the separation of the two realms was established as the assumption of the argument. Next it was shown that forms and things have correlates on their own levels but do not have cross correlation. This was illustrated by the example of masters and Mastership. Now Parmenides

turns to speak of knowledge and Knowledge itself in an analogous way.

He says that Knowledge itself, the essence of knowledge, is of the forms. This is so since forms are related to forms. Attaining knowledge, one would know the forms thus the one thing which a philosopher seeks is Knowledge itself, which Plato associates with divine knowledge as opposed to human knowledge. Concerning the phrase, 'the essence of knowledge' I take that to mean the essential form in all occasions of knowing, moments when we say "now I know". I distinguish between the content of the occasions and the form. The content will vary with the occasions but the form is the same and is the condition of the soul which Socrates spoke of as wisdom. Philosophers are not interested in being able to speak at length before large audiences on the subjects they studied but rather they seek the condition of the soul which is wisdom.

Compare this quote from the Phaedo, "When the soul investigates by itself it passes into the realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless, and being of a kindred nature, when it is once independent and free from interference, consorts with it always and strays no longer but remains in that realm of the absolute constant and invariable through contact with beings of a similar nature and this condition of the soul is

called wisdom."¹ If this is so what of coming and going? I claim that wisdom as the original nature of the soul is always present and all that is required is that the soul recollect, which is not to recall a fact but to remember its original nature.

When involved in dialectical discourse the philosopher embodies all the virtues since he must answer honestly and courageously (not fearing to appear a fool but cherishing the insight more than the opinions of others) and he will turn his attention from the pleasures of eating and drinking and in short be temperate and the condition of the soul will be just since each part will be doing its own function properly. So that with wisdom there is all the virtues as Socrates pointed out and thus with Knowledge itself one 'knows' the normative forms.

Likewise when we know, there is the apprehension of Beauty itself which is the source of the joy in insights, and in the process of seeking to know we dominate ourselves so that we participate in Mastership in seeking to Know.

While Knowledge itself is of forms, our knowledge is of the things in this world. Here 'knowledge' refers to the content of our occasions of knowing. If our knowledge is of things of this world and they are not

1. Phaedo. 79d.

related to the forms then we do not by our shopkeepers knowledge know the forms. This is self-evident. It is also evident that for the most part our attention is turned toward the world and the masters know nothing of masterhip but know about cotton prices and things of that nature, and the judges know nothing of Justice but know about precedents, other opinions. So we cannot as long as we are confined to this shopkeepers knowledge, know the forms.

The seventh premise in the argument, which is also the first conclusion can be read two ways. The usual reading is "since we do not participate in Knowledge itself, then we can not know the forms." This begs the question as it has not been proven that because we do not possess the forms we could not participate in Knowledge. The Greek word epide can also be read 'if' as well as 'since' and this gives an esoteric hint to the way to answer the argument. The ammended sentence would read, "if we do not participate in Knowledge itself, then we can not know the forms." This would still demonstrate that our shopkeepers knowledge would not know the forms while leaving it open that philosophers might.

As a man who was a master might turn and inquire, "what is Mastership?" and is so doing dominating himself, as do all who philosophize, and so come to participate

in Mastership for the first time, so one who knew, and was paid to teach others could turn and inquire what Knowledge is.

There is further support for the 'if' reading in the line "if anything partakes of knowledge itself, surely a god has a better title than anyone else." This leaves it open that we might do so too.

The second conclusion of the argument is that Gods having Knowledge itself would not know matters of our concern. This seems true to me since Knowledge itself is of the forms and not of things in this world which would be matters of our concern. Socrates rejects the argument here as "depriving the gods of knowledge". I think his rejection is ironic, but the problem proved to be a real one for the Christians concerned with divine providence and omniscience. It is a theological matter beyond my scope whether God could be said to have knowledge of phenomenal events.

In the argument there has been a division of two orders of reality and two kinds of knowledge. This is relevant to the distinction between human and divine knowledge which one finds in the history of thought from Homer on. I will discuss this in relation to three things, a book by Bruno Snell entitled The Discovery of the Mind, the digression in the Theatetus, and the example used in this argument concerning masters and Mastership.

In his book, Snell has a chapter "Human knowledge and Divine Knowledge," which documents the development of the contrast between the two kinds of knowledge in the history of Greek thought. I will briefly mention a few of the relevant points.

The Homeric idea of the gods differed from that of Plato, as can be seen in comparing Homer and the third book of the Republic, and Socrates' speech in the Symposium and Otto's book The Homeric Gods. Homer's gods were like super-men, and their knowledge was characterized as "all seeing" as for instance in the catalogue of ships in the Iliad. The gods did not see different things but just saw more than the limited view of mortals. There is something to be said for this notion if we consider humans as seeing parts and gods as seeing the whole of anything. It is still a major part of our criterion for knowledge that we grasp a whole. Xenophanes emphasized the contrast between Knowledge (of the gods) and dokein of the mortals. Dokein refers to both deceptive appearances, characteristic of the phenomenal world where nothing is what it seems, where men who are called masters are really thieves, and to false assumptions (which may be redundant) where all we can have is opinions about the flux. In writing about the example I shall try to show that Plato had this contrast in mind in his writing and using

the analogy which he did. It soon became a problem, a hope, a quest to gain direct access to Divine Knowledge. This would mean to turn from human knowledge but also to question oracles and not acquiesce in beliefs. This is what Socrates was accused of doing when he questioned the oracle of Apollo.

Snell writes how Parmenides, "cast aside human knowledge, i.e. sense experience and sought direct access to divine knowledge...thus he gives us the discovery of the intelligible world as an independent entity."¹ I believe a reading of the poem and its proem would support this. It is very interesting because it relates to this very passage. Parmenides would agree with the conclusion of the argument that our everyday shopkeepers knowledge could not know the intelligible world but he would not therefore cease to seek to know. In so doing he would become like a god.

In the Theatetus we have the following comment from the digression, by Socrates "We should take flight from this world to the other, and that means becoming like the divine so far as we can and that again is to become Just with the help of wisdom."² Here he contrasts two

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1. Snell, Bruno, The Discovery of the Mind. T. G. Rosenmeyer, Tr., Cambridge, Harvard Univ. Press, 1953.
 2. Plato, Theatetus, 176G in Hamilton and Cairns, op. cit.

worlds, and two patterns the divine and the godless and the happy and the miserable. The everyday world is filled with sorrow and always will be contrary to the hopes of some reformers and the philosopher seeks to flee from this world by becoming just, by turning his attention from the phenomenal world and the pursuits of pleasure in that world to the intelligible world and the pursuit of wisdom. As the master can turn to question what Mastership is, so the philosopher can turn to ask what wisdom is. As the master must then question various roles and games he is involved in, so the philosopher would question those roles and games which he was involved in, for instance, the philosopher who was giving lectures and thinking that he knew when in fact he was disseminating dogmatic statements as a garbage man pours garbage from the full to the empty. The teacher relates to the student as a master to a slave but then he misses the chance to be a real master. The teacher finds himself giving lectures from the same notes and being bored and unable to keep up with the 'increase of knowledge' which of course refers to the build up of the content, knowledge may be increasing but our understanding of it is not, and our knowledge of the way up mount analogue is no better now for all our ability to lecture at great length before large audiences. We can turn toward divine knowledge which I suggest is the Platonic program.

Now I will discuss the analogy masters:Mastership:: knowledge:Knowledge Itself. That this analogy is intended is obvious from the parallel construction in the passage and from the line at 134a5 "and similarly Knowledge itself." To expand and clarify an analogy one can discuss the relations that hold between two of the terms and then see if they hold between the other two terms. The relations between the terms are the important focal points so that we do not ask how occasions of knowledge are like masters but how the relations between masters and Mastership are like the relations between knowledge and Knowledge itself. Here Knowledge itself is the divine knowledge, as evidenced by the line that gods would have best title to it, and our knowledge is the human knowledge. We have noticed that there are many men who are called masters but only one form Mastership. So by analogy there are many occasions of knowing but only one form of Knowledge. This fits with what was said about Knowledge itself being the essence of knowledge, the essential in all occasions of knowing. So the first contrast is between many and one. And while the many occasions are many their objects are also many but the one Knowledge itself is one and its object, the intelligible world, is also one since the forms have their being in relation to each other and so can't be essentially isolated.

Next we have observed that Mastership is what it is but that men who are called masters are in the realm of deceptive appearances and are not masters, since they do not participate in mastership, but are in reality thieves since they exploit the slaves and rob them of the fruits of their labors. Here we have the contrast between appearance and reality on the part of masters and Mastership and in the realm of Knowledge we have an analogous contrast between opinion, or assumptions and Knowledge. If the objects of knowledge are, and sensible objects appear then they can't be objects of knowledge, but as proven in book V of the Republic they lie in between being and non being and the awareness of them lies in between knowledge and ignorance, that is in the realm of dokein or opinion.

As for the Theatetus distinction between the two patterns that of divine happiness and godless misery, I think we can extract from the analogy those two patterns on both sides.

On the side of masters and Mastership we noticed that the master who does not dominate himself or the other eventually gets weak and fat and is overthrown. This is the observation which Hegel made which so influenced Marx and Sartre. Thus conforming to the pattern of godless misery the master winds up in misery but the zen master on the other hand, who is the closest

I can come to one who has tried to participate in Master-ship is the paradigm of one conforming to the other pattern, the pattern of divine happiness. I must add that this is all "as far as possible" since zen masters suffer pains and sorrows too. Only a dead zen master would not suffer.

On the side of knowledge we know that the 'knowledge' which is the vanity of mortals which enables them to give their long lectures does not give the Happiness one seeks and that on the other hand the Knowledge which comes in the moment of insight does and can be compared with the aesthetic experience or the experience of love and is so compared in the Symposium.

But how is one to partake of this Knowledge itself? The answer lies in conversion. As the master would have to turn from the old games and seek to bring himself and others to perfection as far as possible in order to participate in Mastership, so the philosopher would turn toward Knowledge itself and care more for the form of knowledge than for the content. Let us compare this with the Republic and Phaedo. The Platonic programme of education is discussed in Book VII of the Republic and in the Phaedo. I want to discuss that some to show how the passage in the argument I am commenting upon can be reconciled with the spirit of these books.

In the Republic Book VII Socrates tells an allegory of education, the story of the prisoners in the cave. In the cave men sit chained facing a wall upon which flicker shadows cast by artifacts being carried across an elevated roadway in front of a fire at the back of the cave. They entertain themselves by discerning patterns among the shadows. One is released and made to turn around and stand up. He is at first blinded by the fire-light but then adjusts to the brightness and can see the artifacts being carried in front of the fire. Then he is dragged up a rough ascent to the world outside the cave where again he is blinded by the light and has to adjust slowly, at first he can look only at shadows of the trees and stones and at their reflections in the water, then he can look directly at them, and finally he can look at the moon, the stars and the sun. Then he is forced to go down again into the cave and is blinded by the sudden deprivation of light.

This journey ascends the divided line and illustrates it. In our passage we have mention of men who own slaves, and who have a knowledge of our world, they are like the prisoners chained facing the wall looking at shadows. In the Phaedo we read that desire for pleasures of the body forges these chains which bind us. The process of turning around is paralleled in the Phaedo by the stages of dying which Socrates discusses, and in our passage by the master

turning to inquire what Mastership is. In so doing, he turns from pleasures of the body, of eating and drinking, love and adornment. This does not mean he practices a stoic ascetic life, but if anyone reflects upon the time he indulged in philosophic discourse I think it will be obvious that for that time he ignored those pleasures, letting a good meal go cold. I do not mean that everyone who chats about "philosophy" does this but those involved in the quest of self knowledge. He turns from the senses and their objects toward the forms, asking "What is Mastership?" He no longer regards the ~~imitation~~ of a shadow that one finds in examples of men called master in our world, and sees that they are really thieves -- this I think is seeing the artifacts.

Ascending out of the cave is the process of dialectic which is a rough ascent for anyone since he has to undergo the torpification of realizing that he does not know. He has to be courageous enough to appear foolish in front of others. He has to answer honestly. Outside the cave is into the realm of the ideas which involves looking at shadows (the third section) and then at trees (the fourth section) and then at the sun (the Good). According to the Phaedo this involves turning toward the ideas (third and fourth sections of the line) and purification, which involves making this turn a habit. Then the final stage of dying, or the separation of the soul from the body is

the attainment of wisdom, which in oriental schools is enlightenment, and Platonically it is represented by looking at the sun. There is a strong mystical streak in Plato's works and it cannot be ignored. The early works, Phaedo, Phaedrus, Symposium, Republic especially emphasize this, although the digression in the Theatetus points to it too, and I suggest that our passage in the Parmenides is in line with the spirit of these earlier works. It is well known that the dialogues document the Socratic method of dialectic which involves questions and answers and attempting to come to agreement and understanding. Socrates did not use technical language such as "quantifying into opaque context" or "fallacy of excluded middle" but his language was that of the agora. Yet his talk was not the shoptalk of the agora but was vitally concerned with the pursuit of truth and self knowledge. It deserved the name dialectic.

As we distinguish two kinds of knowledge, the shopkeepers knowledge of the everyday world and Knowledge itself, the goal of the philosophers quest, so we can also distinguish between the shoptalk of everyday discourse and the dialectic of the philosopher.

Plato gives ground for doing so in the passage at hand. At 133d he has Parmenides say, "things in our world which bear the same name as the forms are related among themselves and not to the forms and all the names

of that sort that they bear have reference to one another, not to forms." This suggests that there can be talk which has its reference solely to things in this world. However, at 135c Parmenides says, "If in view of all these difficulties and others like them a man refuses to admit that forms of things exist or to distinguish a definite form in each case, he will have nothing on which to fix his thought, so long as he will not allow that each thing has a character which is always the same and in so doing he will completely destroy the significance of all discourse." This would suggest that there cannot be talk which has its reference solely to things.

Sinaiko sheds some light on this by pointing out that the last phrase can be read more technically and thus would read "destroy the power of dialectic."¹ This removes the apparent contradiction because only in dialectical discussions does one turn ones attention to the forms and so require them to fix his thought on.

When the master turns toward Mastership, when he turns from everyday knowledge to Knowledge itself he also turns from shop talk to dialectic as his mode of discourse. This is supported by the passage quoted above from the Phaedo.

1. Sinaiko, Love, Knowledge and Discourse in Plato, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1965, p. 191.

To sum up my position, I believe it is possible to know Beauty itself and it does not follow from the fact that we do not have the forms that we cannot know them. It also does not follow that we cannot participate in Knowledge itself just because we do not have it.

It remains true that we cannot participate in Knowledge itself while we participate in ordinary knowledge, as we cannot discourse dialectically while we make small talk. The whole structure of the argument points to this, and to the notion of conversion as the solution to the problem of the knowledge of forms.

Therefore, I claim that the reading, "if we do not participate in Knowledge itself, then we cannot know the forms"¹ follows from the premises of the argument but the alternative reading of the first conclusion, "since we do not participate..."² does not follow. Given the 'since' reading we should balk and question the argument. The Parmenides requires its readers to do dialectic to understand it.

I will now review the comments of the other commentators, beginning with Cornford. He holds the argument to be "almost grossly fallacious".³ I believe he is wrong

1. Parmenides 134G.10. See page 21 above.

2. Ibid.

3. Cornford, op cit. p. 98.

and will show why.

He claims that the argument, "confuses the forms (Mastership and Knowledge) with perfect instances of the form...(Master itself, what it is to be master)."¹ I claim counter to this that the latter phrase is an ordinary Platonic way of mentioning a form, in this I am supported by Edith Schipper who writes, "Plato is not talking about 'ideal' masters...but about forms."²

Cornford's interpretation of the example makes it hardly fit as an illustration of the principles of the argument. The principles include, forms are what they are in relation to each other. As an example, Mastership is what it is in relation to Slavery. Cornford protests, "Mastership is not the master of Slavery."³ But Plato nowhere says that. Again one can say that the car was seen by Jones or that it was seen by sight (as opposed to hearing) and we can say that Beauty was known by Socrates or that it is known by Knowledge itself. This does not confuse forms and perfect instances.

Cornford wants to show that it is still possible that, (1) gods could rule "imperfect slaves like ourselves"

1. Cornford, op. cit., p. 98.

2. Edith Watson Schipper, Forms in Plato's Later Dialogues. Martinus Nijhoff, the Hague, 1965, p. 15.

3. Cornford, op. cit., p. 98.

and (2) "we can start from imperfect knowledge of the forms themselves and gradually improve that knowledge." Neither of these compromises will do. The argument shows that the classic problem of two worlds is thier relation. Cornford seems to be defending a 'Homeric' view of divine knowledge rather than a Platonic view. And as for starting from imperfect knowledge of the forms, it shows that Cornford does not know what he is talking about. What was characterized as knowledge of our world cannot know the forms.

In fairness to Cornford he does give a clue to the solution of the problem when, in criticism of the sharp division between two worlds, he reminds the reader of the doctrine in the Phaedo that souls are more akin to the unseen and intelligible than to the seen. This should in turn remind one of the stages of dying discussed above. Bluck, Sinaiko, and Schipper all criticise Cornford's criticism and it seems clear to me that we must look for another criticism of the argument. For that I turn to the comments of Runciman and Ryle.

Ryle calls the argument, "a general argument against the possibility of there existing any relation between the forms and their instances." I do not see how he can characterize it this way since he adds, "it would certainly require a much profounder inquiry into the varieties of relations than Parmenides supplies to establish

the point". Perhaps he does so because the argument makes use of the principle that there is no relation between two terms not of the same types. That at least is Ryle's version of it. However, I would qualify the principle to read "for the most part".

For instance, while it is true that John who is a student is called a student in virtue of his having paid fees and occasionally attending classes, it is also true that it can occur to John to ask, "What is it to be a student?" and then he would question whether he was himself being a student (i.e. studying zealously). In the latter case I say he does relate to the form student hood as opposed to the resemblances found on campus. But for the most part he does not do so.

Ryle moves too quickly from, "if there are forms, they cannot be what our knowings are knowings of," which I would agree with, to, "We cannot know the forms," which does not follow, since it has not been shown to be impossible that we should participate in Knowledge itself.

One who held a non-dualist view of Knowledge and Reality would not have the problem of relations between entities of different types. According to the dualist view of knowledge, there is the knower and the known and knowledge is the relation between them. According to the other view there is no knower but only Knowledge itself,

this is knowledge by union. It is common for mystics to talk of death of the personal ego and in fact we found Socrates discussing the successive stages of dying in the Phaedo. If there is this death, then where is the term of different type the relation with which we were worried about? But this talk gets obscure.

Runciman also commits the nonsequitur, "Phenomenal knowledge can only be relative to the particulars in our world. Therefore we cannot have knowledge of the forms." This, of course, limits our knowledge to phenomenal knowledge (what is called in the argument 'knowledge in our world'). He does say, "Parmenides does not establish that there cannot be any relation between the form of knowledge and our particular acts of knowing." And he concludes dogmatically, "since our minds are capable of apprehending forms as well as sensory particulars it follows that some relation must exist." If he had gone into that it would have been useful and interesting. So both Runciman and Ryle point to the analysis of the relations that can hold between forms and us as the clue to the solution of the problem of knowledge. Recall that Parmenides spoke of seeking some other means by which things participate in forms and how we suggested that participation in Knowledge itself is involved. This is a radically different doctrine about forms than what is usually offered. Forms are objects upon which to fix one's

thought and their role in physical explanations of the world is largely an Aristotelian misunderstanding.

In this paper I have maintained, (1) that Plato did not have a "theory of forms" since he had no articulated theory of participation, and therefore that (2) in the Parmenides he is not criticising 'his own theory' as some commentators say. I have also claimed that the result of the Master Argument, as I read it, is in harmony with the spirit of the earlier dialogues (Republic and Phaedo, Phaedrus and Symposium), which I maintained was education viewed as conversion, and turning from knowledge of our world to that divine Knowledge of Beauty, Justice, and all the forms.

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